



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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## **Help Curb Pertussis Outbreak: Get Vaccinated, Stay Home If Sick**

Four new cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, have been confirmed in Lewis and Clark County in the past week, bringing the total to 23 cases since March. It's likely that additional cases have not been diagnosed or reported.

The persistence of the outbreak has prompted county health officials to urge all residents – adults and children – to make sure they're up to date on their pertussis vaccinations.

"This outbreak is not letting up," said Karen Dobson, public health nurse supervisor with the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department. "One of the best ways to slow it down is for every child and adult to make sure they've been vaccinated. Anyone with a bad cough should stay home and get it checked by a health-care provider to avoid spreading the disease."

Pertussis is a serious respiratory illness that spreads easily through sneezing and coughing. Dobson said simple common-sense measures can help reduce the spread, such as covering a cough and washing hands often.

"People shouldn't assume that, just because they've been vaccinated, they can't get or spread pertussis," she added. "They can. There's no substitute for common sense."

Infants are the most vulnerable to complications from pertussis, in part because they're too young to be vaccinated.

"Basically, the more adults who are immunized, the less chance there is of the disease spreading to babies and children," Dobson said. "Parents can protect their infants further by keeping them away from people who are coughing."

Pertussis can lead to pneumonia, brain damage, and death in infants under age 1. More than half the victims in this age group require hospital care. In Montana, several infants have been hospitalized with pertussis since January.

Although pertussis is not uncommon, Montana has seen 155 confirmed cases so far this year, compared to 54 at this time last year. The disease has been reported in 17 counties, according to the state Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The health department recommends immunization for the entire family:

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is to protect and improve the health of all county residents.*

- **Adults.** Parents, grandparents, day-care workers, and all others who have never received an adult dose of Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) should get a single dose as soon as possible. This especially applies to adults who are in close contact with children under age 1.
- **Pregnant women.** Pregnant women who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose during the third trimester, late second trimester, or right after delivery. Maternal antibodies transfer to the newborn and may offer some protection until an infant is old enough to be vaccinated.
- **Children.** Children need five immunizations to get full protection. The shots should be administered at 2, 4, and 6 months of age; between the age of 15 and 18 months; and at about the time the child starts kindergarten.
- **Teens and pre-teens.** A booster shot is recommended at about age 11 or 12. If an adolescent wasn't fully vaccinated as a child, a health-care provider can offer guidance on catch-up doses.

The health department offers walk-in vaccination clinics Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1930 Ninth Ave. No appointment is needed, and all insurance carriers can be billed. For more information, call the department at 443-2584.

“Ultimately, we hope residents will recognize the need, not only to protect their own health, but to play their part in safeguarding the health of the entire community,” Dobson said. “Together we can create a circle of protection for the most vulnerable among us.”

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